

# **ASSURANCE SECTION**

## **REPORT OF A COMPREHENSIVE EVALUATION VISIT**

TO

UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI  
Cincinnati, Ohio

April 27-29, 2009

FOR

**The Higher Learning Commission**  
A Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

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## **I. CONTEXT AND NATURE OF VISIT**

### **A. Purpose of Visit**

A twelve-member review team conducted a standard comprehensive evaluation of the University of Cincinnati (UC) for continued institutional accreditation. The visit did not include any Change Requests or other special reviews.

### **B. Organizational Context**

The University of Cincinnati, dating to the 1870s and accredited since 1913, first operated as a private and later as a municipal institution for most of its existence; UC became a full state institution on July 1, 1977. Even today, however, the strong bond between UC and the city of Cincinnati is evident in the many partnerships that exist between the two entities.

During the past 10 years, since the last HLC comprehensive re-accreditation review, UC has undergone a transformation process, started by the previous president with a major facilities project of over \$1 billion in new construction and continued with the development of numerous planning and programmatic initiatives by the president appointed in 2003 (the first change in this position in 19 years). While the 19 years of the previous presidency saw a physical transformation of the campus, significant academic and strategic planning and change began in 2003. In sum, UC has transformed itself in many ways and now better serves all its constituencies.

### **C. Unique Aspects of Visit**

There were no particular or unique aspects to this visit. Although a few months before the visit the President announced her departure (effective June, 2009) to lead another institution, this departure did not affect the visit.

UC has begun the process of converting from a quarter system to semesters (to be implemented fall 2012), a change that presents an exceptional opportunity for program and curricular review (including assessment). It appears that the university is seizing this opportunity.

The team chair participated in a pre-visit on February 8-9, 2009 simply to get acquainted with the institution, some key administrators, and several individuals directly involved in leading the Self Study process, as well as to plan more effectively for the team visit.

### **D. Sites or Branch Campuses Visited**

Although UC has two regional branch campuses, in Blue Ash and Batavia, they are independently accredited by HLC. Thus, the team did not visit the branch campuses. During the time of the team visit, however, the university was engaged in formal discussion about instituting a greater level of integration between the Uptown Campus (main campus) and the branch campuses, particularly in the academic programs and faculty. Actions resulting from this integration project may have implications for the current independent accreditation of the branch campuses. UC has kept, and will

continue to keep, the Higher Learning Commission informed as the institution proceeds through this integration process.

#### **E. Distance Education Reviewed**

In 2006, UC received approval from the Higher Learning Commission to be able to offer its degree and certificate programs through distance education without prior Commission approval, based on the fact that the university has the necessary knowledge, experience, support systems, and resources to continue to successfully offer courses and programs at a distance. The visiting team concurs with this assessment of the institution's capacity to continue to offer quality degree and certificate programs through distance education. Currently, UC offers the following such programs: A.A.S. (2); B.S. (5); Pharm. D. (1); M.A. (1); M.Ed. (2); M.S. (2); M.S.N. (2); and Graduate Certificates (2).

#### **F. Interactions with Constituencies**

AAUP Leadership (7)  
 Academic Coordinating Committee (7)  
 Academic Health Center and CARE (5)  
 Academy of Teaching Fellows (6)  
 Alumni Affairs Representatives (3)  
 Assessment Representatives (8)  
 Associate Dean of Business  
 Associate Professor of Business  
 Athletic Director, Associate Directors and Assistant Director (4)  
 Board of Trustees (3)  
 Campus Planning/Capital Committee (2)  
 Campus Facilities (3)  
 Center for Community Engagement Representatives (4)  
 Center for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning and Faculty Development  
 Representatives (5)  
 Chief Diversity Officer  
 Chief Financial Office and Key Staff (6)  
 Chief Information Officer and Senior Staff (4)  
 College Access and Success Representatives (7)  
 Collegiate Restructuring Steering Committee (7)  
 Community Engagement Representatives (9)  
 Community Representatives (9)  
 Criteria Co-Chairs (11)  
 Dean of Engineering  
 Deans and Associate Deans (8)  
 Distance Learning Representative (6)  
 Diversity Task Force (6)  
 Educational Outreach Representatives (5)  
 Emerging Ethnic Engineers/Upward Bound/WISE (4)  
 Entrepreneurship Education and Research Center Representatives (5)

Faculty: Open Meeting (12)  
 Faculty Senate (5)  
 Federal Compliance (10)  
 First Year Experience/Learning Communities Representatives (8)  
 Fiscal Coordinating Committee (10)  
 Foundation President  
 General Education Representatives (7)  
 Graduate Council (7)  
 Graduate School (2)  
 Health Sciences Leadership ()  
 Institute for Policy Research/Evaluation Services Center/Center for the City  
     Representatives (5)  
 Integrated Core Learning Representatives (7)  
 Interim President  
 Library Leadership (4)  
 Live Well Collaborative (6)  
 President  
 President's Budget Advisory Committee (5)  
 Professional Practice Representatives (11)  
 Research Officers (4)  
 Semester Conversion Task Force (5)  
 Service Learning Representatives (7)  
 Social Justice Representatives (7)  
 Sr. Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost  
 Sr. Vice President for Administration and Finance  
 Staff: Open Meeting (15)  
 STEMM/Choose Ohio First Representatives (5)  
 Strategic Enrollment Management (6)  
 Student Government (6)  
 Students: Open Meeting (23)  
 Study Abroad Leadership (6)  
 UC Capital Campaign (7)  
 UC International (2)  
 UC|21 Representatives (6)  
 Undergraduate Research Representatives (6)  
 Vice President for Government Affairs and University Communications and Key Staff (3)  
 Vice President for Research and Key Staff (4)  
 Vice President for Student Affairs and Key Staff (4)  
 Vice Provost for Assessment and Student Learning  
 Vice Provost for International Affairs

#### **G. Principal Documents, Materials, and Web Pages Reviewed**

AAUP Contract  
 AAUP Works Chapter Bulletin: Various 2008 Issues  
 Accredited Professional Programs: Feedback from Accrediting Agencies

Affirmative Action Report 2008-09  
Annual Assessment Meeting Agendas and Minutes  
Assessment Summaries: 2008  
Board of Trustees Minutes  
Career Development Center Website  
Center for Access and Transition Website  
Center for Exploratory Studies Website  
Collective Bargaining Agreements: Six Different Unions  
College Alignment Reports  
Course Syllabi: Samples  
College Alignment Reports  
Course Descriptions: Volumes A and B  
Diversity Inventories  
Diversity Task Force Report  
Equal Opportunity Documents  
E-Portfolios/CLA pilot Documentation  
E-Reviews: Template and Samples  
Excellence in 21<sup>st</sup> Century: Integrated Liberal Learning  
Faculty Handbook  
Federal Compliance Report  
Financial Information Report: Volumes 1 and 2  
First Year Experience Website  
General Education Assessment Website and Reports  
General Education Website  
Graduate School Annual Report  
Graduate Student Handbook  
Graduate Student Survey  
Honors Program Website  
Human Resources Policies and Procedures Manual  
Institutional Research Website and Reports: Retention, Transfer, NSSE  
Integrated Core Learning Assessment  
Integrated Core Learning Website  
International Strategic Plan  
Institutional Profile Report  
Just Community Documents and Website  
Leveraging Cooperative Education to Guide Curricular Innovation  
Libraries Website  
Office of Information Technologies Information Materials: Various  
Office of Institutional Research Materials: Various  
Ohio Public Records Act/Ohio Open Meetings Act  
Organizational Chart  
One Stop Website  
Principles of Effective Governance  
President's Report Card and Report Card Website  
Program Accreditation Reports

Report on the Status of UC Women: 2006  
Research Office Website  
Self Study  
Semester Conversion Report and Related Documents  
Staff Handbook  
STEP Publications  
Student Affairs Strategic Plan Report  
Student Complaint Logs  
Student Handbook  
Student Planner: Campus & IT Handbook  
Student Satisfaction Inventory Report  
Student Worker Handbook  
Transitioning to Uptown Campus from Branch Campuses  
UC Branding Initiative  
UC Campaign Materials and Proudly Cincinnati, Tower of Strength, Rock of Truth  
UC College Portrait  
UC Foundation Organizational Chart  
UC Master Plan  
UC Momentum  
UC Promotional Videos  
UCI21 Proposal: Crafting the Class  
UCI21 Seed Grants  
UCI21 Strategic Planning Council Academic Priorities Report  
Undergraduate Program Review: McKicken College of Arts & Sciences  
Upward Bound Publications  
Veterans Services Task Force Report and Recommendations  
Website  
WISE Publications  
[http://calendar.uc.edu/wv3/wv3\\_servlet/urd/run/wv\\_event.WeekList?evdt=20090430,evfilter=6854,ebdviewmode=grid](http://calendar.uc.edu/wv3/wv3_servlet/urd/run/wv_event.WeekList?evdt=20090430,evfilter=6854,ebdviewmode=grid)  
[www.uc.edu/about/](http://www.uc.edu/about/)  
[www.uc.edu/employees/](http://www.uc.edu/employees/)  
[www.uc.edu/uc21/](http://www.uc.edu/uc21/)  
[www.uc.edu/courses/](http://www.uc.edu/courses/)  
[www.uc.edu/propractice/](http://www.uc.edu/propractice/)  
[www.magazine.uc.edu/0904/MainStreet.htm](http://www.magazine.uc.edu/0904/MainStreet.htm)  
[www.admissions.uc.edu/learning.html](http://www.admissions.uc.edu/learning.html)  
[www.caahs.uc.edu/](http://www.caahs.uc.edu/)  
[www.uc.edu/ucit/departments/irc/ftrc/](http://www.uc.edu/ucit/departments/irc/ftrc/)  
[www.uc.edu/virtualtour/](http://www.uc.edu/virtualtour/)

## II. COMMITMENT TO PEER REVIEW



**A. Comprehensiveness of the Self-Study Process**

The team notes that the self study process involved representatives of all pertinent constituents and much effort was made to conduct an open, transparent, and participatory process. Additionally, there was clear communication between the institution and the HLC liaison. Overall, it appears that the Self Study process served the institution well as it reviewed its progress during the past ten years and as it thinks about and plans its future.

**B. Integrity of the Self-Study Report**

The team compliments UC for the thoroughness and preparation of the Self-Study Report. The team is fully aware how difficult it is to prepare such a report, one that is so thoughtful and informative. The Self Study Report, both thorough and succinct, provided the review team extensive, credible, and accurate information for its discussions with members of the university community and on which to assess the HLC criteria. The team found no discrepancies between the Self Study Report and the information acquired during the visit. On the contrary, the team believes that the Self Study Report understated the scope and quality of the many initiatives and activities undertaken by the institution during the past ten years, particularly during the past five or so years since the current President was appointed.

**C. Adequacy of Progress in Addressing Previously Identified Challenges**

The team considers the response of the organization to previously identified challenges to be adequate.

**D. Notification of Evaluation Visit and Solicitation of Third-Party Comment**

Requirements were fulfilled.

UC placed an advertisement in the three area newspapers (*The Cincinnati Enquirer*, *The Cincinnati Herald*, and *The Business Courier*) during the week of January 5, 2009, inviting public comment.

The Higher Learning Commission received two third-party comments prior to the team's visit. Both letters were shared with the team. One letter praised the university's leadership team for the "outstanding job" it has done "in recent years" to bring about "many needed changes." The second letter spoke very positively of the university's relationship with the "Cincinnati region" and provided specific cases of partnerships between the university and the business community, for example, that have helped "drive our community forward."

**III. COMPLIANCE WITH FEDERAL REQUIREMENTS**

The team reviewed the required Title IV compliance areas and the student complaint information.

UC provided to the team a separate, comprehensive and detailed written report on Federal Compliance. This report could serve as a model for other institutions.

#### IV. FULFILLMENT OF THE CRITERIA

**CRITERION ONE: MISSION AND INTEGRITY.** The organization operates with integrity to ensure the fulfillment of its mission through structures and processes that involve the board, administration, faculty, staff, and students.

##### 1. Evidence that Core Components are met

- UC has a well defined mission as a public, urban research university which is communicated effectively and supported by the institution's actions. The current mission statement, which was developed through a broad-based and highly participatory planning process, was approved by the Board of Trustees at its January 29, 2008 meeting (with a minor amendment approved on March, 2008). The mission statement articulates UC's commitment to serving the public, from local to international, through its programs for undergraduate, graduate, and professional students as well as through its research programs and service activities. Furthermore, the mission statement commits the university to excellence in all of its endeavors and to diversity in its students, faculty, and staff. The mission statement can be found in the institution's website and is constituents are familiar with it. Documents reviewed showed, and discussions confirmed, that both academic and non-academic units, such as Student Affairs and Athletics, are aligned with the UC mission statement, values, and goals.
- With the arrival of a new president in 2003, the first in 19 years, UC engaged in an unprecedented strategic planning process that involved thousands of stakeholders, including faculty, students, staff, alumni, community representatives, donors, among others. Throughout the process, the university community was well informed about the institution's vision and goals and had ample opportunity for comment and input. This process resulted in a set of six core values (such as citizenship, stewardship, and cultural competency), six strategic goals (such as placing students at the center, increasing research activity, and forging partnerships), and vision; this vision is known as *UCI21: Defining the New Urban Research University*. This plan, articulated in the *UCI21 Technical Report*, also led to greater integration of the institution's planning, budgeting, and campus operations to be more congruent with UC's mission. Additionally, all UC colleges and units were required to align their missions with the institution's six goals and to prepare an action-oriented alignment report. The Board of Trustees supports UCI21, as evidenced for example, by its recent action in adopting six resolutions to continue the principles of UCI21 into the next administration.

- Interviews with employees, students, board members, and community representatives affirm that the UCI21 message has been clearly articulated and disseminated. Programs and Committees throughout the university have strived to align institutional activities with the goals of the UCI21 brand. Support for the president's leadership in developing a strong vision for the future permeates conversations, academic and support units, and projects at every level of the university.
- UC operates with integrity in its dealings with students and employees as evidenced by the policies and procedures which are readily accessible and well thought out. UC's *Rules of the University* defines institutional expectations for conduct and ethics. In addition to formal written policies and structures for dispute resolution, the University Ombuds is available to mediate concerns between departments and both students and employees. The university has negotiated dispute resolution processes or grievance procedures for all employees, i.e., with all seven employee unions. Visits confirmed that campus processes are perceived positively. UC maintains and enforces policies pertaining to research practices such as protection of human subjects, conflict of interest, and environmental health and safety. Additionally, the university expects its students to demonstrate integrity as outlined in the Student Code of Conduct. Finally, UC operates with integrity in its dealing with the external community and other constituencies.
- UC, which in 2008 was ranked as one of the 20 most diverse campuses by *The Princeton Review*, is committed to serving a diverse population of students, faculty, and staff, as noted in its mission statement and one of its core values: cultural competence. In 2007, the President appointed a 40-member Diversity Task Force to assess the institution's progress toward diversity; the task force prepared a report that included over 50 recommendations. As a result, diversity was incorporated into the mission statement, the president established an ongoing Diversity Council, and the position of Chief Diversity Officer was created. The university is in the process of implementing many of the other recommendations made by the Task Force. Another indication of the university's commitment to diversity and that it is preparing for a changing student body is a Provost Office driven comprehensive plan to support the increased registration of veterans.
- During the past five years, UC has reviewed the committees and processes of shared governance and decision-making, resulting in a new model of shared governance. A Faculty Senate task force reviewed all 160 university-wide committees in place in 2005 and developed a set of "Principles for Effective Governance" which was approved by the Board of Trustees. This model includes input along the decision-making process from relevant constituencies on issues pertinent to those constituencies. The new model, which includes a single provost and several critical committees (such as the Academic Coordinating Committee and the Fiscal Coordinating Committee), was presented to the Board

of Trustees and implemented. This model is working very well, although it is “still a work in progress.”

- A review of documents and websites, as well as conversations with key stakeholders indicate that during the past five years, campus constituents have collaborated on task forces and committees to design and redesign processes that will take the campus to new heights of excellence in equipping graduates to be productive global citizens. Faculty and staff are committed to recruiting and mentoring students in their academic, social, and professional growth.
- UC has seven unions and governance bodies, each with its own process for responding to student, faculty, and staff concerns. Documents reveal that the processes are clearly articulated and steps for recourse with problems are in written formats and clear. Indeed, one central document presents an excellent overview of the functions of these bodies.
- UC has established policies to ensure that students are involved in the governance of the institution. In addition to Student Government, student representatives are members of numerous university committees and task forces, including the Academic Coordinating Committee and the Fiscal Coordinating Committee. Students spoke highly of their involvement in the university’s governance structure.

## **2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**

- Although UC has undergone an exceptional comprehensive planning process since the last HLC review for continued accreditation and as a result many positive changes have been implemented, the plan has not been fully implemented and even those changes that have been implemented have not been fully institutionalized. There is concern within the institution and with the team that the strategic plan be fully implemented, including the six goals of UCI21 as well as the new governance model.
- Although UC has made recent commitments in the area of diversity, such as the creation of the Diversity Council and the position of Chief Diversity Officer, these initiatives are quite new and not fully integrated into the institution’s culture. Diversity champions have recently followed the president’s mandate to establish a framework for aligning campus efforts with the UCI21 goals. While there are multiple diversity initiatives, some with more than a 25-year history at the university, most of the work in this area has been designed to recruit and retain students of color. A challenge remains to achieve greater diversity in the faculty and administration, as well in aligning diversity and inclusive excellence with teaching and learning.

**3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

- None required.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

- None required.

**Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

**CRITERION TWO: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE.** The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met**

- UC has a goal of instilling a culture of ongoing planning and institutional performance assessment as evidenced in the *President's Report Card* – a University-wide rubric to gauge institutional performance against priorities explicit in UCI21. The institution has established academic priorities, aligned with the university's mission, which help the university develop and articulate its academic programs. This prioritization, in turn, appropriately drives resource allocation. In order to insure that the efforts of academic units are in sync with UCI21 and institutional academic priorities, all units are required to provide the Provost's Office with annual updates on their alignment with the goals of UCI21. This allows UC to identify resources needed to implement university-wide goals and update planning processes in individual colleges and administrative units.
- In order to measure progress toward achieving the six goals of UCI21, the university has developed a series of metrics for each goal to benchmark progress. Assessment information related to UCI21 goals guide institutional academic, financial, and facilities decisions. UCI21 priorities and goals and related performance metrics were developed under the current administration and provide clear direction for both the university community and other constituents.
- In response to previous fiscal challenges, UC is committed to an integrated approach to planning that links academic, fiscal, and physical planning activities throughout the institution. This helps to ensure that academic planning and fiscal budgeting are conducted in tandem. Additionally, quarterly

Board reports clarify financial performance at regular intervals throughout the year.

- Evidence supports exemplary performance on the part of UC's executive team in re-establishing the financial health of the university. Bond ratings, daily cash balances, and continuous fiscal monitoring – all point to a much improved financial performance.
- The health programs (Medicine, Nursing, Allied Health, and Pharmacy) are working with an ambitious agenda involving unprecedented enrollment growth, facilities expansion, program development, and research. These programs have done exceptionally well in generating external grants and contracts to support research and other academic projects and initiatives.
- Declining state support until the 2008-09 budget year and the current economic situation have encouraged UC to merge long-term enrollment planning with performance-based budgeting through the creation of an Enrollment and Budget Committee. This committee has developed a revenue-cost model that is scheduled for phased implementation as part of the university's Performance-Based Budgeting in the coming year. This phased approach to planning and budgeting will simultaneously encourage units to increase revenues while reducing costs.
- Since 1990, UC undertook a major (\$1B) facilities project that resulted in many new building (including several signature architectural designs) and renovations. Thus, UC has demonstrated its capacity to build and sustain an array of facilities and resources that support its mission, including the delivery of effective teaching and learning.
- Distance learning opportunities, consistent with the university's mission, have been used as a way to support increasing enrollment. Students in distance education degree and certificate programs have been served well through such programs. Also, a classroom technology plan has been developed to enhance support for teaching and learning.
- The university is preparing an energy master plan to address the efficient use of energy throughout the institution. Sustainability is being addressed through a broad-based university committee coordinated through Campus Facilities Planning.

**2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**

- None required.

3. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**
  - None required.
  
4. **Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**
  - None required.

#### **Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

**CRITERION THREE: STUDENT LEARNING AND EFFECTIVE TEACHING.** The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

1. **Evidence that Core Components are met**
  - UC leverages the impact of assessment efforts on student learning through a program of annual meetings with academic programs that bring together data evidencing student experiences and learning from multiple sources. With this strategy, UC ensures continuous attention to student learning and promotes holistic assessment of its instructional programs. The process UC is undergoing of program review and curricular redesign in the course of converting from a quarter to semester system is being used to deepen the alignment of learning outcomes and promote assessment across curricular components.
  - There was a great deal of evidence relative to assessment. Professionally accredited programs have demonstrated the identification of outcomes to specific measures, mapping outcomes to curricula, and measuring student results via measurements such as rubrics, portfolios, or some other learning measures. The Graduate School assessment process uses traditional learning outcomes such as theses and portfolios. Some excellent assessment models were identified in several programs, including General Education, Honors, Nursing, some of the Allied Health Sciences, and programs accredited by ABET. The process of regular program review ensures ongoing assessment of graduate programs, and has been extended to include linked undergraduate programs. Student engagement in research, professional presentations, publications, licensure pass rates, placement, and data from exit/alumni surveys are included. External consultants and peer faculty review the quality of the program reviews and a “closure” document summarizes the results and outlines key actions for improvement.
  - The president’s UCI21 initiative, a comprehensive planning process, and the provost’s leadership have articulated a primary emphasis on a learning-centered environment that places “students at the center,” at the core of UC’s many efforts. This approach has directed the formulation of general education across the university. The Vice Provost for Assessment and Student

Learning has collaborated with other administrators and faculty to implement the new general education components and facilitate the assessment of student learning for courses in departments and colleges.

- The university demonstrates a commitment to student learning as evidenced by the many outstanding programs that are in place to enhance the student learning experience such as the co-ops, community engagement, Honors Program, Center for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning, communities of practice for first-year students, and the First Year Experience (FYE). UC's FYE and Integrated Core Learning (ICL) promote best practices in undergraduate education through design of articulated, integrated, and coherent learning experiences from the first year through graduation, such as the development of core baccalaureate competencies across curricular components (UC's "signature approach to undergraduate education"). The introduction of major-based writing courses, experiential education designed to cultivate key academic competencies, and development of capstone experiences are among the curricular features of ICL. Increased institution-wide student retention rates (an increase of 10 percentage points over the past seven years) and improved levels of student engagement (evidenced by NSSE metrics) document the success of such programs.
- UC provides numerous opportunities to undergraduate students for academic advisement through both the colleges (professional and faculty advisors) and central advising programs. Such programs include, for example, the Center for Exploratory Studies (CES) in the College of Arts & Sciences for "undeclared" students (who may be at greater risk for disengagement and attrition), Pre-Professional Advising Center, and the Career Development Center. Student satisfaction with the services provided by CES is high. First year students and juniors who have not declared a major are required to meet with advisors. The blend of advising programs at UC provides students with advisement matched to the needs of diverse learners. A positive trend in the university's six-year graduation rate (from 49% in 1998 to 55% for the 2002 cohort) is indicative of the success of CES and other programs facilitating transition to, and completion of degree programs.
- Following the restructuring that eliminated University College, the university created a program designed to provide undergraduates needing special support for academic success. Students not meeting academic standards for admission to baccalaureate colleges are admitted to the Center for Access and Transition (CAT – recognized by NACADA in 2008 with a Certificate of Merit), which brings together advising and academic professionals with faculty teaching developmental courses in mathematics and writing. 437 students successfully transitioned to a UC college between spring 2007 and winter 2008. CAT is a key strategy for balancing the university's commitment to both increasing its academic profile and providing access to less prepared students.
- UC121 ushered in a strategic approach to enrollment management and several related initiatives to advance the goal of "putting the student at the center," including advising and first year experience initiatives, as well as initiatives for serving both special populations and all students. One-Stop Student Services is a web-based portal where students can accomplish any array of transactions, including virtual advisement, enrollment, application for



financial aid, and payment of tuition and fees. One-Stop captures about 80% of student transactions, enabling staff to increase quality of service for the remainder of more complex transactions. Other initiatives, for example, focus on student success/progression in gateway courses and the expansion of learning communities.

- Through planning and capital development, UC has created formal and informal learning spaces that afford students and faculty state of the art facilities and learning/collaboration technologies that serve the institution's students on the main campus or through distance education. Guidelines for electronic classrooms have ensured that formal learning environments support pedagogical approaches aligned with learning goals. Over 100 centrally-controlled classrooms have been equipped with at least baseline configuration of instructional technology (the remaining 38 classroom are scheduled for similar upgrading). Blackboard is a ubiquitous learning environment (with over 70% of faculty using the platform for teaching) connecting UC campuses, faculty, and students. The student technology Resource Center and UCit@Langsam provide access to equipment, work/study space, and technological assistance to students working on course assignments and/or research projects.
- UC demonstrates support for effective teaching activities through academic leadership in the Provost's Office and as noted through various initiatives such as awards (Dolly Cohen Award for Excellence in Teaching), the recent creation of the Academy of Fellows for Teaching and Learning with faculty exhibiting a strong commitment to student learning and innovative teaching, the creation of the Center for Enhancement of Teaching and Learning (CETL) that provides faculty workshops and peer consulting, an institutionalized teaching evaluation system, and cooperation with AAUP to establish a faculty development fund of \$560,000. Workshops, courses, and seminars offered through CETL promote effective teaching practices and bring faculty together in various learning communities. CETL's success is evidenced by the steady and substantial increase in faculty participation. UC's investment in technological innovations (Blackboard), long standing integration of co-op learning into majors, and the E-Review process provides further evidence of the value the institution places on teaching effectiveness.
- Placing students at the center is the goal driving UC's development of distance (e-learning) opportunities, including degree programs offered fully online. Time or place bound students, and students participating in cooperative education have access to faculty designed and taught online courses. Online programs are developed by faculty, aided by instructional designers and technologies supported in Instructional and Research Computing. The Task Force on Distance Learning facilitates dialogue and development of best practices across the units involved in distance education. Many programs involve well designed program orientations, baseline student assessments, and proactive advisement, which increase rates of student success. Distance learning programs are supported by resources of the university and the state of Ohio, such as Ohio Link.

**2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

- Although there is much assessment at UC and initiatives in this area during the past two years are particularly noteworthy, there is unevenness in both the extent and quality of assessment throughout the university. Also, there is a mix in the culture of assessment and some confusion across the institution regarding assessment terminology.
  - The focus on assessment of General Education over the past three-four years has resulted in less progress for assessment of majors, except for those programs that are accredited by disciplinary accrediting bodies.
- 3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**
- None required.
- 4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**
- None required.

#### **Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

#### **CRITERION FOUR: ACQUISITION, DISCOVERY, AND APPLICATION OF**

**KNOWLEDGE.** The organization promotes a life of learning for its faculty, administration, staff, and students by fostering and supporting inquiry, creativity, practice, and social responsibility in ways consistent with its mission.

- 1. Evidence that Core Components are met**
- Faculty research activity has flourished in a fertile environment since the last HLC comprehensive review, and the second of UC|21's highly publicized six goals is to "grow [its] research excellence." In FY 2009, UC dedicated roughly \$153M (15% of the budget) for separately budgeted research expenditures. While funded grant proposals have decreased (8.9%) for UC in the past five years, an experience echoed nationally, UC's research grant submissions have increased by 6.7%. Patent applications, notoriously lumpy, rose 72% during this same period. Intellectual property, technology transfer, and improved customer service have helped ideas and research results take further, measurable steps toward commercialization. The university has more than \$350M in annual research funding and has received over 300 U.S. patents.
  - In further support of faculty research, UC provides Researcher's Gateway, a secure intranet resource offering grant and writing support, an online database of potential collaborators, a list of funding opportunities, and a

complete collection of policies and protocols to which researchers must adhere. Grant-writing workshops and a research orientation series also help introduce graduate students and young scholars to these essential activities. Further, UCosmic (UC's Online System for Managing International Collaboration) provides a gem of a database that, among its functions, connects faculty members with international research projects, connections, and experience to faculty members with interests in those areas.

- Various annual awards publicly recognize faculty and students for their academic and scholarly achievements, leadership, advocacy, creativity, community engagement, and other important accomplishments. The Honors Program selects the most outstanding undergraduates for enrichment opportunities beyond those available in the regular curriculum.
- The research mission of the University is ably supported by a talented library staff, recently expanded collections thanks to above-average increases to the collections budget, improvements to the library facilities, responsible fiscal management that has, among other things, migrated acquisitions to electronic materials whenever possible and avoided duplication of publications in print, and a statewide network for borrowing called OhioLINK.
- The newly created position of Vice Provost for Assessment and Student Learning is held by a faculty member with a deep understanding of UC's faculty culture, a genuine appreciation for the importance of intelligent metrics and using the results of assessment to improve students' educational experience. She has paid particular attention to assessing General Education and the extent to which undergraduate students master clearly stated core competencies. The General Education website includes a folder for each college that reports faculty rubric-based assessment of student achievement of competencies as demonstrated in the major's capstone experience. The college folders also include records of meetings between general education administrators and college faculty committees and document annual faculty comments and suggestions for assessing undergraduate competencies. As the team heard from many individuals and groups, UC is capitalizing on the 2012 conversion to the semester system to drive revamping and institutionalization of their assessment programs.
- The process of regular program review ensures on-going assessment of graduate programs. Each review results in a "closure" document that summarizes program strengths, weaknesses, and outlines key actions for continuous improvement, which includes attention to student learning outcomes.
- Academic programs that prepare graduate students for faculty positions are complemented by the Preparing Future Faculty program that involves

opportunities for graduate students to participate in faculty development activities and provides orientation to multiple faculty roles in the academy. The Office of Director of Professional Development is enhancing programming that supports graduate students in professional degree programs. Additionally, graduate students benefit from learning environments within UC's many research and service centers and institutes. UC's success in achieving its goal of enhancing the national and international importance of its graduate programs is evidenced by increases in enrollment, graduate degrees awarded, externally funded assistantships and fellowships, and national rankings of many graduate programs.

- At the heart of UC's undergraduate education is Integrated Core Learning, an institutional commitment to the integration of all facets of the academic curriculum with all facets of experiential learning, co-curricular activities, and faculty interactions. UC touts its emphasis not only on students' gaining breadth of knowledge and skill development, but also on the value of transferring learning and habits of mind from one facet to another area – the creative exercise of that learning.
- For the past decade, UC has nurtured an extensive First-Year Experience (FYE) Program, which encourages students to engage with the diversity of urban life that surrounds them, accept the civic responsibilities of an educated person, and connect what they learn in school to what they do and how they do it in the world. This program, which in conjunction with learning communities has contributed to significantly improved retention rates, introduces students to the diversity within their community and throughout their urban setting and readies students for UC's curriculum, which aims to integrate academics with the real world beyond the "ivory tower." Some colleges, such as Allied Health Sciences, require all students to have an FYE experience of service learning.
- The University of Cincinnati places particular emphasis on experiential learning and engaging theory with practice in the real world. The university takes particular pride in its role in creating cooperative education and has established a corporate feedback system (I-LEAP) for use in curricular reform. Employers rate students on mastery of the general education core competencies, thus creating a closed loop assessment that measures student performance in co-op and that directs feedback into curricular development. Results of the assessment are posted on the website of the Office of Institutional Research and are used regularly, for example, by the colleges and Division of Professional Practice. The university is expanding the use of I-LEAP to assess many types of UC experiential learning in a variety of contexts.
- In the "Cincinnati Approach" and elsewhere, UC carefully articulates the value

of partnerships across and outside scholarly boundaries, partnerships that connect theory and research to practice, business, industry, and the community. Experiential learning contexts oblige students to apply what they learn in the classroom and to use judgment in its application. Faculty members in geography, communications, the College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning (DAAP), and other disciplines seek out and develop new opportunities for students to learn in the crucible that is the city of Cincinnati – be it via interviewing formal day laborers, making a documentary about Price Hill, or creating art with (not just for) a local community.

- The university maintains clear and accessible codes and standards for the responsible acquisition, discovery, and application of knowledge. The Student Code of Conduct signals UC's commitment to civility and integrity within and outside the academic context. The Office of Research maintains a user-friendly website that details research compliance regulations and a robust institutional support infrastructure, and the Office of Internal Audit monitors the administration of federal grants and conflicts of interest.

**2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**

- As the institution's external research funding has grown, a relatively high imbalance has developed between the funding to the medical (East) campus and the main (West) campus. Given the university's interest in being a research university, the level of research funding on the West campus is relatively low.
- Corporate funding was up 130% in 2008 (\$15M), seemingly in response to the drop in other sources of funding. Some are hopeful that ARRA will remedy this shrinkage in funding, and UC is working hard to benefit from ARRA; however, UC needs to be attentive to the hazards inherent in over-reliance on corporate- and industry-funded research.

**3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

- None required.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

- None required.

**Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

**CRITERION FIVE: ENGAGEMENT AND SERVICE.** As called for by its mission, the organization identifies its constituencies and serves them in ways both value.

**1. Evidence that Core Components are met**

- Since development of its strategic plan, UCI21, the University has made community engagement a central component that defines its mission as a urban research university. The President, by her words and actions, has elevated community engagement, as a component of the university's research, teaching, and service mission, to a high priority. Her service on a variety of community-wide boards and agencies has elevated the importance of the university in regional efforts to improve the quality of life and economic development.
- University units have historically generated a wide variety of entities and activities that reach out to the community by conducting research and evaluation related to community activities, such as the Community Research Collaborative, the Evaluation Services Center, the Economics Center for Education and Research, the Center for Criminal Justice Research, and the Institute for Policy Research. For some of these units, such as the Institute for Policy Research, their funding is dependent on client demand and thus client interests drive their activities. Others rely on an omnibus survey taken throughout the Cincinnati region that attempts to document and assess community viewpoints and needs. The University has also sponsored community dialogues to solicit community input. Appropriately, however, many of the university's outreach and service activities are driven by faculty interest and expertise as well as the effort to place students in community-based learning environments.
- Historically, various university units and individual faculty have generated significant commitment to outreach and service as an attribute of the research and teaching functions. Recently, however, campus-wide efforts have been made to coordinate, prioritize, and develop a university strategy for engaging the community. Some interesting collaborations may serve as models as the university continues to establish greater collaborative relationships and interactions among the academic units. For example, the Live Well Collaborative is a design studio that allows students to solve problems for private sector clients as well as a collaboration effort between the College of Design, Architecture, Art and Planning, and the Colleges of Business, Medicine, Biomedical Engineering, and the Social Sciences.
- The university is moving from small individual engagement activities to those that would have a broader impact on the region, such as in improving educational opportunities for K-12 students as well as access to higher education and economic development. The active involvement of the

President with regional community agencies assures that the university's activities are consistent with regional community needs and objectives. The broader community now expects this level of engagement from both the President and the university and the Board of Trustees has indicated its strong support for these engagement activities and its expectation that the university's next President will also pursue them.

- In the broad realm of educational opportunity, UC systematically responds to the many community constituencies that depend upon it for service and has significant engagement with other educational providers and community leaders within the region to assure an integrated system of education, from early childhood through university graduation. Also, the university continues to simplify its capacity to accept transfer students, and it generates a wide variety of educational opportunities, through both distance and onsite delivery, for community members. The university is an integral part of an ambitious agenda, begun in 2006, called STRIVE, which is designed to improve the college going rate and educational achievement of Cincinnati children.
- There are also several institutional efforts to engage the business community and to support economic development. A new initiative called Agenda 360 is an ambitious planning effort made up of business, civic, and public leaders who are developing an action plan to advance regional economic development. The President serves on the Corporate Leadership Advisory Council for this initiative.
- The university has undertaken several initiatives to determine the extent to which its efforts at community engagement are valued by the community, including surveys of community participants, faculty, and students. An omnibus survey of respondents in the Cincinnati region, taken annually, shows very significant increases in those who believe the university is "important to the greater Cincinnati region." The results demonstrate that the university is highly valued and the increasing importance of the institution to its external constituencies and the community at large.

**2. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components need organizational attention**

- Given the university's emphasis on engagement with the community, there is much inconsistency across the institution's colleges and other academic units regarding the value placed on community-based scholarship and the extent to which it is recognized within the promotion and tenure process.
- The President of the university has set very strong priorities for the university in terms of engaging with the external community, and her views are well articulated and well understood. However, the breadth of buy-in on these priorities is not clear, and the transition to a new president may put some of

these priorities in play.

- The trend within the campus administration is to continue to support innovation in engagement activities at the unit level but also to define a coordinating and prioritizing role with respect to institutional investments. The team saw numerous opportunities where greater collaboration and interaction between units in their engagement activities could result in synergies and larger impacts on the community.

**3. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components require Commission follow-up.**

- None required.

**4. Evidence that one or more specified Core Components are not met and require Commission follow-up. (Sanction or adverse action may be warranted.)**

- None required.

**Recommendation of the Team**

Criterion is met; no Commission follow-up recommended.

## V. STATEMENT OF AFFILIATION STATUS

### A. Affiliation Status

No change.

Rationale for recommendation: The institution did not request any changes nor did the team find any reason for recommending changes.

### B. Nature of Organization

**1. Legal status**

No change.

**2. Degrees awarded**

No change.

### C. Conditions of Affiliation

**1. Stipulation on affiliation status**

No change.

Rationale: The institution did not request any changes.

**2. Approval of degree sites**

No change.



Rationale: The institution did not request any changes.

**3. Approval of distance education degree**

No change.

Rationale: The institution did not request any changes.

**4. Reports required**

None

**5. Other visits scheduled**

None

**6. Organization change request**

No change.

Rationale: The institution did not request any changes.

**D. Commission Sanction or Adverse Action**

None

**E. Summary of Commission Review**

Timing for next comprehensive visit (academic year – 2018-2019)

Rationale for recommendation: The University of Cincinnati continues to meet the criteria for accreditation as established by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association. Furthermore, the evidence reviewed by the team lead us to believe that the institution will continue to do so.

UC has transformed itself during the past ten years, first in term of its facilities through construction and/or renovation projects totaling over \$1B and during the past five or so years, under the leadership of the current president, in planning and programmatic initiatives that range from academic to service and outreach. Clearly, the comprehensive and inclusive planning resulting in *UCI21: Defining the New Urban Research University* has reenergized the faculty and staff. Given the commitment to the new vision, as demonstrated the many initiatives (e.g., research, undergraduate education, outreach and service, etc.) that have been implemented in recent years, the team is confident that UC will continue on a trajectory of continuous improvement.

**VI. ADDITIONAL COMMENTS AND EXPLANATIONS**

None